

Introduced by Senator Soto

June 30, 2003

Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 42—Relative to women’s health.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL’S DIGEST

SCR 42, as introduced, Soto. Women In Pain Awareness Month.

This measure would recognize the important need to raise awareness concerning gender disparity in pain assessment and treatment in the United States, and would declare the month of October as Women In Pain Awareness Month, to coincide with Women’s Health Awareness Month.

Fiscal committee: no.

- 1 WHEREAS, Research indicates that differences in men and
- 2 women exist in the experience of pain, with women experiencing
- 3 and reporting both more frequent and greater pain. Yet, rather than
- 4 receiving greater, or, at least as effective treatment for their pain
- 5 as men, women are more likely to be less well treated than men for
- 6 their painful symptoms; and
- 7 WHEREAS, There are numerous factors that contribute to this
- 8 undertreatment, but the literature supports the conclusion that
- 9 there are gender-based biases regarding women’s pain
- 10 experiences. These biases have led health care providers to
- 11 discount women’s self reports of pain at least until there is
- 12 objective evidence for the pain’s cause. Medicine’s focus on
- 13 objective factors and its cultural stereotypes of women combine
- 14 insidiously to leave women at greater risk for inadequate pain
- 15 relief and continued suffering; and



1 WHEREAS, Women have a higher prevalence of chronic pain
2 syndromes and diseases associated with chronic pain, such as
3 fibromyalgia, reflex sympathetic dystrophy, or osteoarthritis, than
4 men, and women are biologically more sensitive to pain than men
5 and respond differently to certain analgesics; and

6 WHEREAS, Women's pain reports are taken less seriously than
7 men's and women receive less aggressive treatment than men for
8 their pain; and

9 WHEREAS, Although women have more coping mechanisms
10 to deal with pain, this may contribute to a general perception that
11 they can put up with more pain and that their pain does not need
12 to be taken as seriously; and

13 WHEREAS, Although women more frequently report pain to
14 a health care provider, they are more likely to have their pain
15 reports discounted as "emotional" or "psychogenic" and,
16 therefore, "not real"; and

17 WHEREAS, Women are socialized to attend more to their
18 physical appearance, and are more likely than men to have health
19 care providers assume they are not in pain if they look more
20 physically attractive; and

21 WHEREAS, Men with chronic pain are more likely to delay
22 seeking treatment, but generally receive a more aggressive response
23 by health care providers once they enter the health care system; and

24 WHEREAS, Both men and women are more likely to have the
25 emotional or psychological component of their pain experience
26 suppressed due to Western medicine's tendency to separate mind
27 and body and to view objective, biological "facts" as more
28 credible than subjective feelings; and

29 WHEREAS, It is necessary to begin educating health care
30 providers and those who train them to expose biases that lead to the
31 undertreatment of women in pain; and

32 WHEREAS, Medical schools should endorse, and teach
33 students, an approach that best elicits the concerns of any patient
34 in pain, and that does not discount the patient's subjective reports
35 of pain, which will require attentiveness to the emotional aspects
36 of the patient's reports of pain; and

37 WHEREAS, There needs to be scrutiny on the part of quality
38 care evaluators as well as ethical awareness raising by institutional
39 ethics committees about the current bias in the pain treatment of
40 women; now, therefore, be it



1 *Resolved by the Senate of the State of California, the Assembly*
2 *thereof concurring,* That the Legislature recognizes the important
3 need to raise awareness concerning gender disparity in pain
4 assessment and treatment in the United States; and be it further
5 *Resolved,* That the Legislature hereby proclaims the month of
6 October as Women In Pain Awareness Month, to coincide with
7 Women’s Health Awareness Month; and be it further
8 *Resolved,* That the Secretary of the Senate transmit copies of
9 this resolution to the author for appropriate distribution.

